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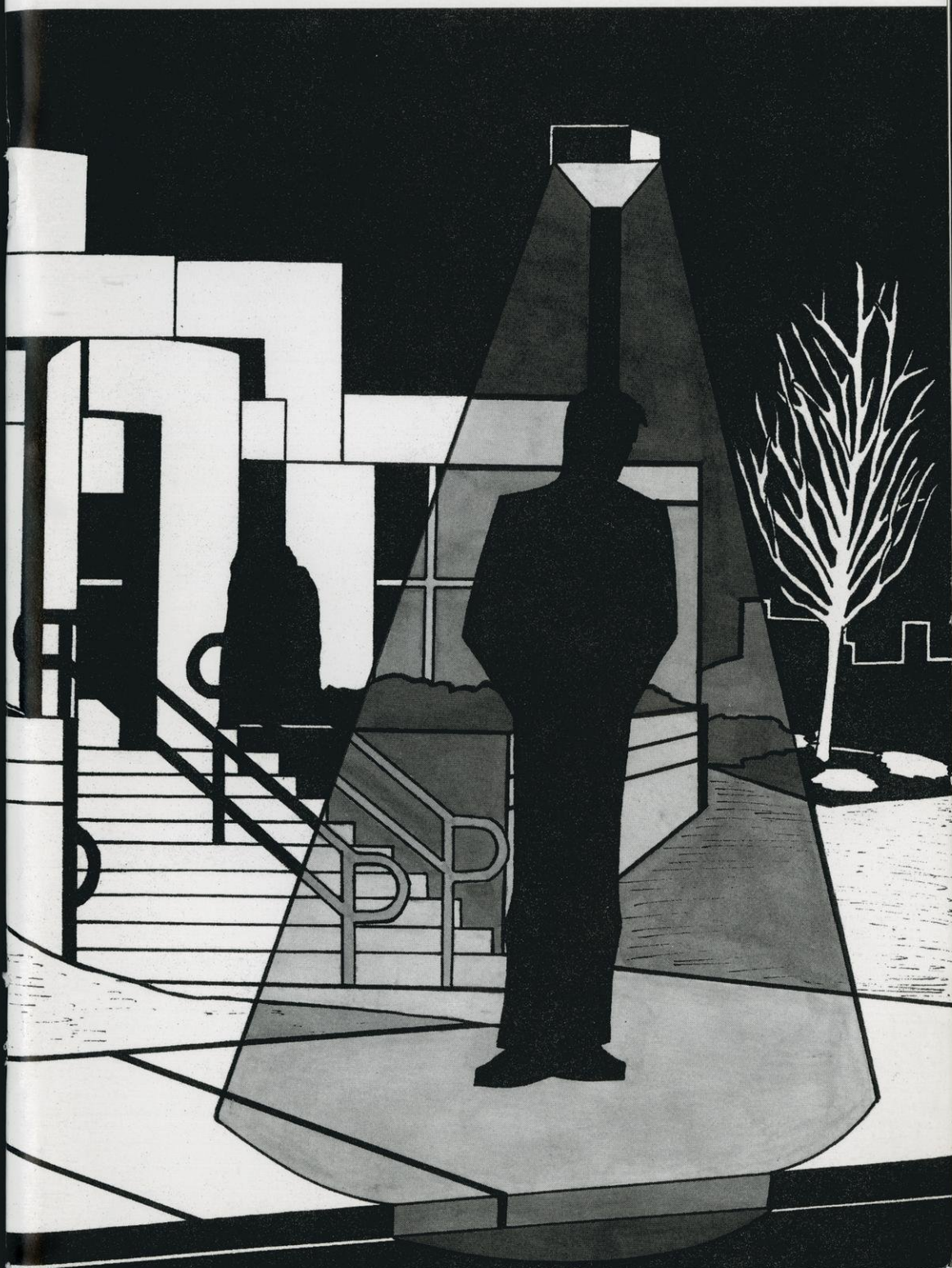
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THE WINDY HILL REVIEW





The Windy Hill Review

2nd Edition

1999

University of Wisconsin
Waukesha County

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21st Edition

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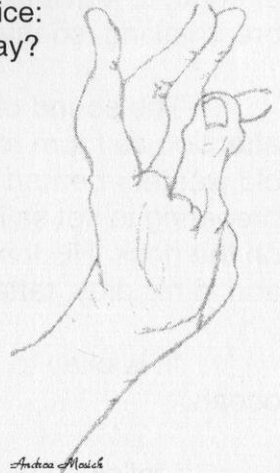
Seeking Island Treasures

Fingers covered with aged spots of time,
Once able, have now passed their prime.
Knobby bumps where knuckles once had been,
Covered with trenches of wrinkled skin.

Hopelessly seeking treasures kept secure in a box,
Crooked, knotted fingers seek to pry open its locks.
Gently, the caverns of the mind fill with memories,
Of an island far away, with palm trees.

A question, softly asked, comes from a distant voice,
As hearing and memory mingle, giving a choice:
What's that again? You from Jamaica, you say?
Grandma, it's me, Anthony, visiting today.

Linda Lirios



Mystic Followers

I looked out upon the waters expecting to see something. Maybe the sailfish I often think I see jumping out of the breaking waves. Maybe the God who often appears to me in my dreams. But the wind is blowing too hard now, maybe seventeen knots. I think about my skinny, long-haired Catholic God and wonder if he understands how I respect, almost worship the ocean.

The ocean should be respected much like a lady. Sailors and fishermen refer to her as a lady because she can hold you and love you one minute and the next her anger can make her more powerful than any ship you may be sailing. Her powerful waters have the strength to give you life and the anger to take it away.

I dangle my feet just above her, and occasionally she tickles the bottoms. My mind begins to wander, and I think of my childhood upon these waters, and I wonder how I found the strength to leave her. How could anyone leave something so breathtaking, so mystical?

The sound of an engine starting up behind me grabs my attention as I turn to see a crew preparing to leave the dock on an old weather beaten boat. One man is standing on the dock. He is preparing to set sail. The man is thin, with long hair and is alone on the dock. His long brown hair looks as if the sun had kissed it, and in his dirty, tattered clothes, I feel so much love for this man.

"It is okay to love her," he said as he looked out upon the ocean.

I followed his deep blue eyes and watched a sailboat dance across the horizon. When I looked back, his boat was gone. And that's when I knew God was one of us.

K. Magolin

I'm Sorry

She stood on the dock,
His picture gripped tight.
He'd never come back,
Not after that fight.
Her flood of tears
Put oceans to shame.
He's gone forever;
Only she was to blame.
Her anger and fury,
Contemptuous respite.
He left in darkness.
Her sole companion,
The night.
She woke with the dawn,
And raced to the pier.
No time to dwell
Or submit to fear.
'Just find him now,'
Was all she could think,
Moving much faster
In view of the drink.
But when she arrived,
All hope was lost.
Gasping for air,
She stood all aghast.
Never did count on being too late.
His last moments with her,
Contempt and hate.
She stood a long while,
Not wanting to part.
Then resolved to go home
And turned with a start.
Swelling rebounded
To tears that ran dry.
For she saw in the crowd,
His forgiving eye.

Rebecca Joslyn

Sestina for Wounded Knee

I shall not be there. I shall rise and pass.
Bury my heart at Wounded Knee.

-Stephen Vincent Benet

The soldiers' hate boiled over
on that December day, and love
for any that weren't of their reality
was lost. They slaughtered women
and their babies. The old and weak
became easy targets of their hatred.

Chief Big Foot's band of hated
Sioux were just trying to get over
to Pine Ridge reservation. He was weak
with pneumonia, but his great love
for his people, now mostly women
and children, kept alive his reality.

Colonel Forsyth had his own reality
check for these red savages. His hateful
Hotchkiss guns positioned on women
and children, ready to wreak havoc over
all in the valley of Wounded Knee. Love
was not to be found-even for the weak.

The colonel had charge of a weakened
regiment that used to be a reality
of a man named Custer-- who had no love
loss for the red man but paid for his hatred
in a place called the Little Bighorn. Over
time, their hatred grew and the fact that women

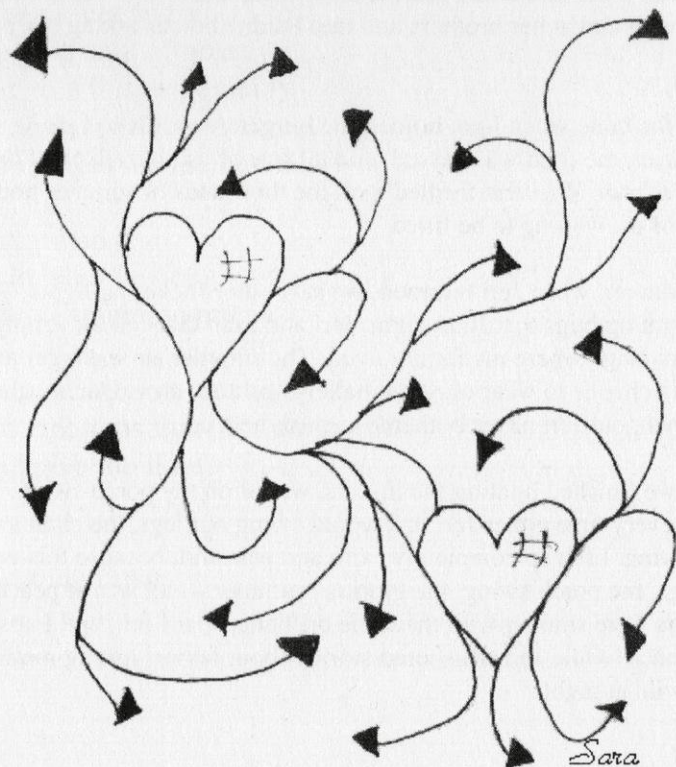
and children were present mattered not. Women
and children of the red man touched weaker
hearts--not the colonels'. Indian wars had to be over
soon and the white man's concept of reality

must prevail. The colonel must disarm the hated
Indians and send them away from the love

and gift of the Creator-the land. This love
proved fatal to nearly three hundred women,
men and children that cold December day. The hateful
soldiers heard a single shot and sprayed the weak
with their Hotchkiss gun reality
firing a shell a second over

the camp. Shrapnel shredded the weak
women and children. Love was lost, reality
was shattered. Hatred won. The Ghost Dance was over.

Carolyn Faber



Summer Vacation

The seven-mile ride home took forever. Fourth grade was done. We had gotten back our papers and art projects. I had won the speed math test that day. My prize was three boxes of Hi-C fruit punch, which sat proudly beside me. Our bus driver, the mayor of Morrill, gave us slightly soggy ice-cream sandwiches as we filed off the dilapidated bus, home at last.

We children started gathering in the park soon after our afternoon snacks. We played tag, teased each other about cooties, and climbed the rock formation in the center of the park. Around dusk, I could see flickering lights - half a dozen grills were cranked and blazing. The odor of hamburgers and hotdogs started to waft across the town. Soon each child's name was shouted. Jeri and I were among the last ones to be called — my parents didn't put themselves on any kind of time schedule, and Jeri's parents didn't grill out at all. They usually had a frozen pizza or Spaghetti-o's.

Before we left the park, Jeri asked me if I wanted to spend the night with her. She said that we could hang out with her older brothers. I knew that there would be raucous jokes and crude videos, and no parents in sight. Jeri would laugh loud and hard with and at her brothers and me. I didn't bother asking my parents if I could stay.

I set the table when I got home. The burgers were always made well, well done. After prayer, the food was passed, and all five of us kids talked at once about our last day of school. We were thrilled with the thousands of summer hours that loomed ahead of us, waiting to be filled.

After dinner, when Jeri returned, we saw other flickering lights. We caught a jar full of lightning bugs that June night. Jeri and I ran through the empty grass lot by the little parsonage where my family lived. The summer air was light and cool. We hadn't had a chance to wear our little halter-tops until now. Our spaghetti straps kept falling down, but Jeri never bothered to push hers up.

After we finished hunting the insects, we sat on my porch swing. It needed to be greased -every time either Jeri or I would swing our legs, the chains sounded like horses braying. I felt so completely calm and peaceful, because this was my home. The bugs, the porch swing, the glorious summer — all was at peace in my world. The stars were shining with the same brilliance that I felt, and I absorbed their magnificence, while Jeri whispered stories about fathers hitting mothers and kids who ran wild at night.

Why I Drink

Sometimes
when I'm anxious
I pour grape juice into a
stemmed crystal glass
and hold my pinkie finger out as I drink
because it makes me feel refined
at a time when I feel most drained
of any class at all.

Sometimes
when I feel angry
I pour a shot of brandy
and toss it down quickly
because it burns my throat
and makes me feel alive.

But usually
I sip black coffee
from a steaming mug
that says "over the hill"
because anxiety and anger
are emotions that take too much
and give too little.

Patricia Karnes

Habits

*Her ancient hands
Clench life's story,
The knots and calluses deflect her pain,
Tiny, veined serpents slither among bruises
On her wrinkled, Leopard canvas.*

*She peels potatoes and conscience,
Stripping away chapter after chapter
Until truth is naked and revealed.
She is like the Bangkok go-go dancer,
She continues, knowing nothing else.*

*These two women, like leaves on a shared branch,
Cling helplessly to their habits.
Time has come to rinse the stench of old songs,
Release these trapped snakes,
And let them slither on, in comforting grass.*

Christopher Zurn

The Dream

Last night I dreamed you died again.
This time you were not full-grown,
but just a tiny child.

Again I pleaded to God to heal you
or release you from your pain,
knowing losing you would multiply my own
Once more I raged at the heavens
when you died in my arms.

When I awoke I wondered
how I could lose you again.
But I've lost you a million times already.
Over and over, through the ages and stages of your short life,
I lost those precious children that you were.
Even so, I still had you, with all your hopes and dreams.

Now you're gone.
And so I dream of you dying.
At least I am able to hold you once again.

Chris Abresch

PLANTING ACORNS

"Where were you last night?" he shouted at me for the umpteenth time. How could I tell this unshaven burly cop what really had happened? No reality-based person would understand, much less a middle aged law officer.

I remain silent, not to vex him, but to review for myself the strange incident that had caused me to be in this local jail arrested for apparently no reason.

I was driving down Highway 83 near the Nagawicka Park about eleven at night. It was dark and raining, and my windshield wipers had quit when I swerved and crashed into an old oak tree. It wasn't so much a crash but an entrance. I drove right in through the bark but didn't come out the other side. I was wrapped in the middle of this historic oak tree.

Birds were singing in harmony, a woodpecker tapped out a cross rhythm, and I could hear gravity defied as the water rushed upward. Then I saw her. An ageless woman in a purple lace dress. Her strong arms were holding a basket woven from reeds. Her low raspy voice called to me. "Come here, child. We've been waiting for you."

I undid my seat belt, unlocked the car door and stepped out onto dried leaves. "Come this way, child. Follow me." As if a magnet was hidden in her basket, I was drawn to her. She led me to a circle of white stones. "Sit here and listen." I obeyed without question and sat within the circle on a tree stump. I could see the moon and all the stars of the Milky Way.

My body felt warm from deep inside. Her words, spoken like a soft breeze swirling around me, told me a tale of my ancestors: "One day, many, many years ago, in the spring your ancestor Tonaka was walking along a dirt path with her soon to be lover, Forrest. They were laughing at little jokes only they understood. As they approached the old oak tree, he took her left hand in his and kissed the palm. "Will you marry me tonight" he asked. Shyly she replied, "When fall comes and the oak leaves are red and yellow and the acorns drop to the ground, I will give you my answer." Then she kissed him on the tip of his nose, giggled, and

ran off knowing in her heart she wanted only to be with him, but a lady doesn't say yes the first time she is asked to marry.

Summer came and went as Tonaka and Forrest spent the days braiding daisies into crowns for each other, sitting in the branches of the oak tree, whispering love poems and dancing under the stars at night.

The geese flew south, and the days became cooler. The leaves of the oak tree began to turn golden, and the squirrels gathered acorns for their winter feasts. On a stormy night in October, Tonaka and Forrest came again to the oak tree. "Marry me tonight," he pleaded. Her lips parted to give him the long awaited yes when a bolt of lightning struck the oak tree right where the branches formed a crook. It crashed to the ground instantly killing Forrest. Tonaka never wept. She gathered all the acorns and planted them in one place deep under the ground where Forrest lay. She sat alone and waited through the winter. In the spring, a little oak began to grow. She cherished it, and year after year she cared for the little oak, knowing it was her Forrest. In time, she sat in its branches and sang love songs with the birds. In the summer she decorated it with daisy chains. The tree grew strong and handsome just like her Forrest. Every October the tree dropped acorns to the ground, and she would answer, "Yes, I will marry you."

Then looking right through my eyes she said, "I am Tonaka, your ancestor. Come help me tonight plant these acorns by the light of the moon." Together we spent the night planing acorns as she sang songs of love. On the oak tree, standing tall under the full moon, silhouetted the form of Forrest and she danced circles around the tree touching it gently with the palm of her left hand. As the sun began to come up, she gave me the last acorn. "Don't wait to do what is right in your heart. Keep this acorn and remember: this is your heritage."

The cop, having been silently pulled into the myth, again asks, "Where were you last night?"

"Planting acorns."

I Didn't Know

I don't know what ever made me think I could just forget,
Forget those memories of unspeakable acts,
Acts that occurred in closets, bathrooms, bedrooms,
Always, always, committed behind closed doors.

How could I think it wouldn't change who I was?
That precious child, so impressionable and innocent,
Being dominated and controlled, used,
Used for the purpose of others.

I didn't know my identity was destroyed,
Taken, before it had a chance to develop.
Lost, survival becoming the only reality -
Survival from those that threaten and hurt.

I never knew it would hurt so bad
To hold all those feelings and the pain inside,
To keep all those secrets and lies
Just to protect what I thought was life.

I didn't know it wasn't just life,
That it's alright to cry,
That something wasn't right,
I didn't know . . .

Megan Ford

Sonnet #332: Dream Star

I dreamed a dream of wire, and a moat,
and crowds of people there, benumbed with fear,
and men in uniforms, and shouts made clear
that apprehension was the proper note.
With finger dipped in blood has Khayyam wrote,
the only bright in awful sight most drear,
and vacantly, at me, a man did peer.
I saw a Star of David on his coat.

And Men were gone, these apparitions, shades
from some dream world was never really seen;
or was it seen by others, palpably?
But must be real. This mystic view pervades
my now reality. What can it mean?
He tried to hand his David's Star, to me.

JAMES KACZMAREK

The Burial

There are words that stay with everybody throughout their entire life. It would be nice to believe that everyone carried around happy words with a positive message. However, the sentence that forever was etched in my brain could only bring me shame. Yet, perhaps it has made me a better person because I strive to not let it be true. People say that if you bottle these up inside, they just breed more destructive thoughts. Supposedly, you'll feel better if you share them with someone. I had hoped to take these words, uttered by my grandmother, to my grave never said aloud again.

In early summer 1988, just before entering 3rd grade, my mother, along with my three siblings and I, moved in with her parents in their one-story house in a stuffy, upper-middle class neighborhood in Menomonee Falls. As for God, I felt as if He'd left town for the next two years, probably scared off by the she-devil living in the house. He went on vacation just when I needed Him most.

At first, it was just us kids with our grandparents because my mother was in the hospital – not from a physical illness. I assume now that she had a nervous breakdown, but my grandmother kept it very hush, hush. There was ample room for us; they had four bedrooms and only themselves to occupy it. I shared a room with my sister Bambi that was situated in the back of the house – next to the one that we thought was haunted.

My grandfather – Papa – was a rather subdued gentleman. He came home like clockwork at six each night for his supper and *Star Trek* afterwards. He needed to be passive to endure my grandmother – Granny. They made a horror movie a few years back titled “The Granny.” She must have been the inspiration. She's had gray hair as long as I can remember – she always seemed old to me. It would be an understatement to say she was stubborn. Almost nothing pleased her; everything in *her* house had to be done *her* way. She was very set in her ways and often gave no explanation why. We had to accept her the way she was or forever be on her bad side. The only way she ever acted was aggressively. If something needed to be done and it wasn't getting done, she'd do it herself and then let you hear about it later.

Somehow, this mean old woman got it in her head that birth order had a connection with the kind of person you were. It was further supported by the fact that her second child was now in a mental hospital. That was how she decided to hate me – me being the second eldest. People would probably say that I was only a child and therefore created this conspiracy theory. However, I did not imagine her malicious behavior towards me.

I had carried a blue baby blanket with me around the house since I was really little until it mysteriously disappeared when we were living with her. I suspected that she stole it from me because she would always harass me for dragging it with me everywhere – it was my security blanket and she wanted it gone. Granny also never had a smile without pity for me. And I could forget about special privileges. I was the one inside taking a nap while even my

younger brother and sister could be outside playing. I was the one who was forced to sit at the table and finish my plate of food. I was the one to blame when no one else would take credit for an accident or something destroyed or missing. She also spoke with quite a nasty tongue. I'm still surprised today at how she could throw out such vulgar language at a little child. Secretly, I collected all the insults and reprimands to make sure I wouldn't do it again. I don't know if that helped or only made me weaker.

Granny favored the first child, and in that sense, Bambi was my salvation. As long as I was with her, I could withstand any such ridicule. But most of the time with her I didn't have to. Granny almost saw me as a better person when Bambi was around.

During my stay in Menomonee Falls, I attended a Christian day school that had no more than 150 students enrolled in its nine grades. Each teacher taught two consecutive grades. I was in the 3rd grade and in the same classroom with Bambi. I would even have to admit that I might have been the teacher's pet. I never got any overly special treatment from Miss Moldenhauer, but she was always sure to be nice to me. She knew I was too fragile for harsh criticism.

One particular Wednesday saw me bringing home my 3rd quarter report card – straight A's. The bus departed at 3:30 as usual from Bethlehem, already filled with Catholic school kids. My half-hour ride on the bus increased my desire to share with Granny the good news I was so proud of. Finally, I had proof that I was not the horrible person she suspected I was.

Four o'clock in the afternoon found Granny doing dishes – they were washed after every meal, although that particular load may have been left over from lunch. If Papa had been home, he would have been drying them.

Granny could see me come directly through the living room to the kitchen – right above the kitchen sink was a sort of window into the living room. She turned to look at me as I stepped up beside her. I unfolded the yellow slip of paper and held it up for her to see. I wish Bambi had been with me then. She stopped scrubbing her dish to get a better look at it. Bambi might have stopped what happened next. Granny gave a chuckle that promised a devastating reply – I was properly warned and should have listened – and said,

“If you're so smart at school, how come you're so stupid at home.”

B Boettcher

Charity Ball

Gnarled, Wrinkled, Blistered
Hands that have handled Machinery
And Livestock
Dingy nails, Split from Winter work
Callused palms, Scarred and Sliced by weeds

Shuffling through the box of clothes
Searching for a Semi-clean Shirt
And Trousers
Cracked nails Snag scarves and kerchiefs
Before Resting on the night's Garb

Blazing Brilliantly, the Lighted city
Churning sea of Poverty
And Homelessness
The Distinguished and Prestigious cannot be found
In this dumping ground of Humankind

Attired in Costume, the Owner of the hands
Looks around his Cardboard dwelling
And Leaves
I say, Your Outfit is quite Curious
Are you going to be out Late

He Scrunches his Brow and Tilts his head
Disconcerted, he says, I slave all day for Food
And Warmth
Have the Courtesy to not Begrudge me
An occasional Dance



Sara Kitchener

Wildflowers

I opened my car door and sat down, noticing a crumpled *Big Red* chewing gum wrapper that I hadn't seen before. It must have rolled out from under the passenger seat where it was hidden. Immediately I thought of Lisa. Big Red was her favorite gum, and she let the world know it, chewing three pieces at a time, chomping away at them with this big toothy grin. I remember that big smile and pudgy face, her cheeks constantly rosy with natural blush. She had a hearty laugh that made it seem like all was well. I wish she could have told me differently.

Lisa and I met through my dad's community theater group. We both discovered that everyone in the production was a miserable actor, and we were no exception. We shared chuckles and grins as we heard the leads belt out song after comical song with the greatest of seriousness. Our friendship grew in leaps and bounds after that. We spent many hours talking and laughing on the phone until the early hours of the morning, sharing details of our lives that we wouldn't dare reveal to anyone else. Still, as close as we were, she just couldn't tell me.

I started the car, instinctively reaching to turn down the blaring radio. I pulled out of the "employees only" parking lot and headed down the street and onto the freeway on-ramp, accelerating and blending into the anonymous body of surging traffic.

On the freeway, the familiar green and blue signs greeted me as I rushed past, eager to get home after a long day's work. I glanced at them out of habit, checking for the minute possibility that they had something new written on them. Milwaukee - center lane. Chicago - right lane. Downtown - keep left. I moved over towards the center lane after checking the side view mirror. I looked up at the signs one more time and felt myself pull right suddenly, taking the next off-ramp as if the car had a mind of its own. I turned off the radio, silencing Boy George. The music was getting to me.

I remember how we used to joke about 80's music- bands like Wham! and Culture Club. Lisa always defended these big-haired musicians with their glossy lips and made up faces. She *had to* defend them because she owned a copy of K-Tel's *Best of the 80's, Volume 3*. I chuckled quietly as I recalled having borrowed that same CD from her. The funny thing is that I actually began to like it, too. Glass Tiger and Corey Hart didn't sound too bad, after all. I didn't realize that when she gave me the CD to keep, she was saying goodbye to me.

I drove down the boulevard, turned right, and pulled into to the flower shop, feeling the crunch of the gravel parking lot beneath my tires as I pulled in. I walked to the entrance and opened the door, assaulted by the kaleidoscopic explosion of colors and scents that permeated my senses. I walked to the back of the store, looking for the right flower. I noticed the lilacs, roses, tulips and lilies, my thoughts keeping me company. As I turned to walk through the back aisle, I noticed a lovely little bunch of wildflowers. I had never seen these here before. I took them off the shelf.

I like wildflowers. In a small bunch, they are unassuming, yet so beautiful. They have these perfect little multicolored petals, so fragile, yet so tenacious. You can plant them almost anywhere, and even if they are not watered, they seem predestined to bloom.

I pulled out my wallet as I approached the cashier. She greeted me genuinely, her adolescent features showing through in her bright metallic smile. I smiled back as I took out a twenty and handed it to her. In the background, I heard the crackling sound of a transistor radio. The fuzzy voice gave today's forecast and highlighted the economic outlook for the week. Then a local news station advised us to watch tonight's special report on America's growing fight against child abuse. My smile evaporated.

I left the shop, got back into my car, and drove the last six blocks to the cemetery. I gazed at the enormous cast iron gates as I passed through them. I drove slowly towards the back of the cemetery, taking in the familiar scenery. The giant oak on the left.

The crabapple tree on the right. The pair of birch trees - one bent over, as if reaching for something. Yes, here it is. My car came to a gradual stop, and I slowly got out.

I walked towards the grave, wildflowers in hand, staring at the large marble stone in the distance. It grew larger with my every step. As I neared the huge stone marking her place, I noticed that there were fresh pink roses in my vase. Lisa's dad used to give her pink roses. I used to see them at Lisa's house often, especially on the days she called me, asking me to come over and keep her company. I never understood it then.

Abruptly, I jerked the pink roses out of my vase and threw them on the ground nearby. I grabbed the vase and shook it upside down, removing any rose petals that might have fallen inside it. I placed the vase back in its spot and put the wildflowers inside it, arranging them for the fullest, prettiest effect. I took a couple steps backward and eyed the gravestone like a painter scrutinizing his latest masterpiece. It looked beautiful; Lisa definitely would have liked it.

I sat down next to the gravestone, suddenly feeling the wet grass seep through the seat of my trousers. I jumped to my haunches, shifting my weight to one knee. I tried to say something, but I was at a loss for words. Somehow, Lisa would understand.

Finally, I left. I grabbed the pink roses, snatching any stray petals from the ground. I walked over to the custodian's shed, towards the garbage can. I threw the roses and the petals into the bottom of the can. I noticed that a few petals fell outside of the garbage, so I picked them up and threw them away with a final gesture, leaving no trace of them.

I walked back to my car, sat down, and took a breath. I turned the keys in the ignition, and the car gently hummed to life. I glanced over and realized that the *Big Red* wrapper was still there. I decided not to throw it out until I got home.

Christopher Zurn

A Window For Joe

*He sits in the park,
His back like an arch;
As they pass him by,
They see him and sigh.*

*He walks down the street
And stares at his feet;
They stare at him,
Hiding their grins.*

*Sometimes, he wonders why,
When they walk on by,
Some wear a silly grin,
While others turn from him.*

*A window for Joe,
On third-floor or so,
To watch the world go by,
And stare into a blue sky.*

*He sits in a chair all hunched and curled,
Looking through his window to the world;
A window is all he needs,
So no one sees that his heart bleeds.*

Linda Lirios

The Bonding Experience

How do I tell my best friend that I like him? Jay is not the type of person you just . . . tell that to. He's always been there for me as long as I can remember, through good times as well as bad times. He still teases me about the time I made the mistake of getting my tongue and bellybutton pierced at the same time. I was so miserable! I couldn't eat solid food, much less talk, nor could I move from the bellybutton up. There's also the countless times I stayed at his house because I was afraid to go to mine. Jay got along really well with his family, but he did his best to understand what it was like living with an abusive father and an alcoholic mother. When I ended up in the hospital from an overdose of prescription drugs, he never left my side. We've been through so much together. I don't want to even imagine where I'd be right now without him.

What I want to know is WHY I could even picture him as anything more than Jay McCarthy; my drinking buddy, my confidante; a sarcastic, wisecracking, sometimes pain-in-the-ass best friend. We do everything together - skateboard, play video games, go to Raves . . . he's seen me at my worst, and vice versa. Lately, his worst isn't looking so bad.

We have been in the Black Dragon tattoo parlor for the past two hours. Jay's tattoo has long since been done, but he won't let me see it until we get to the car. I haven't even gotten to see the design he drew for it. I, on the other hand, have been lying on my stomach and gripping the table for the past half an hour. Jay designed my tattoo - it's really wild - it's an all Celtic design. I love watching him draw. When he's concentrating really hard, he sticks his tongue out and he looks just like a little boy. I love it when he does that! Oh god, what am I saying? This is the same guy who will rent porn movies, fast forward to all the climactic scenes, and make me watch while he mutes the sound and makes the actors and actresses say whatever pops into his head. His voice breaks into my thoughts.

"Does it hurt much, 'Liv?" he asks me, wincing as I squeeze his hand.

"I feel like my shoulder has completely detached itself from my body," I reply, touched by his concern. The needle forces the ink into my skin, and I picture the intricate designs that Jay worked so hard to perfect.

"Hey, Olivia - I'm going to go look at the body jewelry, so don't go anywhere, 'kay?" He grins. I shoot him a look.

"Okay, I'll try not to, smartass."

Jay walks to the glass case and peers among the sterling silver hoops and barbells. He doesn't want to see my tattoo until it is completed. He says it will ruin the element of surprise. My skin feels like it's on fire.

"We're almost done," the guy assures me, swabbing my shoulder once again. Jay flashes me a thumbs up and I smile. I want to laugh, but I'm afraid to move, so I don't. I don't even really want a tattoo, but Jay insisted that it would be a bonding experience, so I swept all fear of pain and the voice of reason aside. All that mattered was that 'Jay said'.

I desperately want to tell him how I feel, but there's no telling how he'll react. Is he going to treat it as a big joke, like he does with all the other things he doesn't want to deal with; will he politely keep his distance until I "straighten out" and think "rationally"; or will my fantasy become a reality where he admits that he feels the same way that I do? I have to do this. If don't say something now, I may die of regret.

When the tattoo is done, I'll do it, I promise myself. I will definitely tell him then. Until THEN, I think of things I will say to him to warm up to the subject.

Jay, remember a few weeks ago when you were dating Nicole Wallace until you found out that she was cheating on you, and I made you promise that you 'd never see her again? Well, part of me was a little jealous because-

You and I have been friends for a really long time and-

Okay, you know that comfortable familiar feeling you get when you put on your most ugly, scrubby pair of shoes, but they 're also your favorite shoes - of course, I 'm not saying that YOU'RE ugly and scrubby, I 'm just saying . . .

Oh, hell . . . Jay, I 'm in love with you-

The needle stops, and the guy gets up from his stool.

"Okay, you're all good to go. By the way, that tattoo is cool as hell, if I do say so myself. Enjoy." He grins, waving us out the door.

Jay and I walk out to his car . . . very slowly.

"Your shoulder still hurt, 'Liv?" he asks me grabbing my hand.

"Yeah. What about your arm?" I touch the gauze bandage very carefully, and he inhales sharply.

"A little bit," he grimaces.

"Sorry." I grab his hand again. We both gingerly get into his car, wincing with every movement. The pain is bearable, however, because Jay and I are going through it together - just like always. Jay turns to look at me, his eyes shining with excitement.

"You first," he insists. I carefully pull back the white gauze bandage from my shoulder, feeling the warm summer air graze over my fiery skin.

"Holy shit! That rules! He made it exactly like my picture, detail for detail," he crows, obviously pleased with himself. He turns to me again and stares intently into my eyes.

"My artwork is a part of you forever, which makes me a part of you forever," he adds solemnly. I want to kiss him, but I don't move. I could be lost in his eyes forever, and I wouldn't complain. I wait until he breaks our eye contact, and he tenderly takes the bandage off of his arm.

His tattoo is absolutely beautiful. The dots of crusted, dried blood cling to the design, but underneath is the most amazing, intricate tattoo I've ever seen. My eyes follow the vine winding around his upper arm and entangling itself among the suns, moons, and stars. In the center of it all is the name NICOLE. A heart is in place of the "O" in her name. A thin trickle of blood is working its way down from the bottom of the heart. How fitting. I grab a Kleenex and begin to dab blood and alcohol.

"It's bleeding again," is all I can say. My cheeks flame, and every part of my body hurts, covering up the pain in my shoulder. A lump expands in my throat and salty water stings my eyes. Jay starts the car and cranks up the radio.

"I told you it would be a bonding experience. I, in a way, am bonded to Nicole, and you and I are bonded together because nobody else will ever have the original design that I made just for you."

He smiles as he lights up a cigarette. I wonder if somehow all three of us will be bonded like this forever or if things will change. I wince once more, and a tear escapes my eyelid. I turn to look out the window, but I'm not quick enough.

"Hey, hon - are you okay? "Liv?"

I wipe my eyes and take a deep breath. With the last bit of strength I can muster, I nod.

"I'm fine. I'm just in an incredible amount of pain right now."

We don't speak for the rest of the way home.

Renae Schwenk

Day After Day

Day after day I think about how things used to be.
I think of the good things, but worst of all, how you treated me.

You could make me feel things that I never thought I would.
But you also made me feel worthless and no good.

I'd like to say I can forgive and forget,
but I can't let myself do that yet.

I'd give you an inch and you'd take a mile.
It seemed like you were never there, not even for a smile.

Some mornings I would wake up staring at the wall.
Some mornings I would wake up ready to give it my all.

I look back on our relationship as if it were just yesterday.
The laughs, the cries, the fights that made us stray.

I wonder why things had to be that way.
Why you would get so angry.
Why you would never apologize the next day.

I used to think that we could never be apart.
Well, that is, until the day you broke my heart.

I have given to our relationship more than you will ever know.
I used to have love for it, but now there is nothing to show.

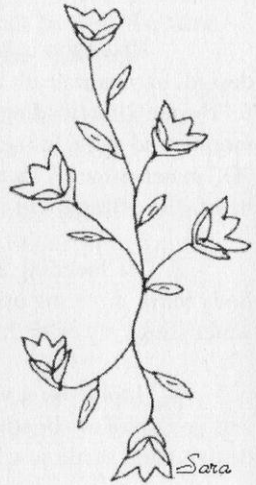
Even when I was up you seemed to bring me down.
You made me feel stupid and not worth being around.

I sometimes reminisce on the good times in the past.
However, I knew that was too good to last.

I'll never forget the feelings that came over me.
The crunch of my stomach and the fall to my knees.

It all still seems so real to me even though you are gone.
Because of the constant flashbacks, it is hard to move on.

One day I know deep down inside you will realize what you have done wrong.
But for now I must look ahead for myself and be strong.



Even though I may be feeling bad and hurting today.
I know that being away from you will soon pay.

Day after day I will be able to forget how you made me feel.
However, right now I need to look deep inside myself and find strength to heal.

Melissa Ackerman

NONNIE

Wrinkled hands
Linked pieces of a puzzle
A river of blue rapids flowing from the heart.

Sounds of an age old lullaby
Washed ashore on a river bank of experience
Patted on a newborn's bottom.

Ancestral stars breathe a song
Captured on the sands of reality
A life reflected in rhythm and shells.

"Do your hands know the melody?"
Asked the baby in heaven.
"Are these the whispered lines so long forgotten?"

"My hands move slowly with joy
Found again in the grains of age"
And the gnarled fingers still play the tune.

Kizzy

Queen Jenny

Jenny was the devil in disguise with strawberry blonde hair and a face full of dark brown freckles. She physically matured much faster than the rest of the six girls in our class, and for that reason, she thought that she had the authority and superiority to claim our classroom as her queen-dom. This gave Queen Jenny the power to destroy the childhoods of the "Peasant class" and grant freedom to her royal subjects (basically anyone whose parents had money and kissed her ass). She had the power to make someone's life a living hell, and unfortunately, that someone was me.

I was the only girl in the class whose parents didn't own companies, or perform brain surgeries, or inherit enough money to build a summer home in Florida in addition to the million-dollar mansion in Chenequa. My parents didn't drive Saab Turbos or Mercedes Benz, BMWs, Volvos, or Porches. They drove an old, beat-up, rusty Ford Pinto with holes in the floor and a rampant gasoline odor. If my parents weren't both teachers at the school, they never could have afforded the seven-thousand-dollar-a-year fee, and I would have attended the local public school.

I never had the fancy clothes labeled "Guess" and "Esprit", and I never wore designer underwear like the other girls. My big head of red hair and my hairy arms and legs never made up for my financial misgivings. I was teased and tormented and despised by the other girls for six long years.

Jenny seized every opportunity available to humiliate me, belittle me, slander me, and make a major fool out of me in front of as many people as she could find. She always loved a big audience. Her torture of choice was throwing anything she could salvage off of the dirty floor into my fatty head of hair, where it would stay until I made a big effort to get it out, which would be as long as it took me to realize why everyone was laughing at me.

One of the most agonizing instances I can recall from sixth grade alone was a slumber party from hell at Jean's house. All six of us girls were invited: Queen Jenny (the witch), Princess Dawn

(her sidekick and personal ass-kisser), Ruth and Jean (her royal followers), and Sydney and me. Sydney was strange, but quiet and rich, so they generally left her alone.

The night of the party, while everyone was asleep, I woke to the sounds of Jenny and Ruth's evil whispers. My heart pounded as I worried that they were talking about me. My suspicions were correct, and I listened closer.

"She is such a geek," Ruth whispered through the silent room of sleeping bitches.

"Did you see what she was wearing today?" Queen Jenny replied.

"Yah. What a loser. Do you think she ever brushes her hair?"

"Never," Jenny groaned. "Hey Ruth, let's spit on her."

The two girls laughed, and I heard them rustling towards my sleeping bag. I still pretended to be asleep while they both spit in my hair, laughing evil, snobby laughs all the while. I wanted to jump up and spit back right into their cruel faces, but instead, I cried myself to sleep.

Sara Besserer

Caged

I LOOK AT MY CANARY IN HIS CAGE
AND WONDER AT HIS SWEET AND SIMPLE LIFE.
THERE'S NOT A SIGN OF SADNESS OR OF RAGE.
MY MINISTRATIONS GUARANTEE NO STRIFE.

I WISH THAT I COULD BE THAT TINY BIRD.
NO CARES, CONCERNS, OR DUTIES TO ATTEND.
NO NEED TO WINCE OR CRY AT ANY WORD;
NO FENCES, LIVES OR BROKEN HEARTS TO MEND.

BUT THEN I LOOK AGAIN AND THINK I SEE
COMPLACENCY - AND SORROW IN HIS EYES.
I KNOW THAT SUCH A LIFE IS NOT FOR ME.
HOW SAD TO NEVER, EVER LEARN TO FLY.

SO PEOPLE AND CANARIES CAN BE CAGED.
THE COST OF THAT CANNOT BE FULLY GAUGED.

CHRIS ABRESCH

Music

Quiet Quiet, hear the cry of the wolf-
Singing
The Music
Hear it feel it within you.

There is no music.

You can't hear it, but I can.
Shh
Try, listen
Quiet
It's all around you if you just open your ears.
It's the hum of the wind

The Hum of the wind

The rain beating on the earth

Drumming, Drumming

The rustle of the falling leaves

Graceful, Peaceful

Hear the cry of the wolf, singing the song of the mother earth, the love
and respect he has for his home. Hear the song he sings to you.

I can hear it, I can feel it.

I am music, you are song. Everything is beauty. Together we are united.

United

We are strong.

Andrea Mesich

Road Construction

Leaving the office, I prepared for the worst. It was springtime, and road construction was in full force. After an already miserable day at the office, I couldn't take much more stress. As horns blared and dust flew into my car, I could feel my heartbeat rising. Turning my head for a second allowed someone to cut in front of me. Not knowing that they were in front of me, I almost hit the car. I had to slam on the brakes to avoid them.

I remembered an article on road rage. It was on the rise. It sounds so stupid when you hear about it, people getting out of their car to kick the crap out of someone. Yet, I was close to doing the same thing. I managed to completely avoid the situation. Instead of getting out of my car and threatening the other driver, I drove off the freeway and took the long way home.

I listened to the radio the rest of the way home. I happened to catch the traffic report. Even though it was a little late, I listened anyway. "... an accident on I-77 near Greenway Terrace has traffic in a standstill ..."

"Son of a bitch!" I turned the station.

Oak Dale Apartments is known as being one of the sleaziest places around. It is also the cheapest, and that is why I still live there. It has an outdoor swimming pool and is surrounded by a mosquito-infested forest. This was the first time I hadn't taken the freeway home, and I was surprised to notice how the area deteriorated as I got closer to home.

The parking lot looked full as I pulled up, but I entered anyway because there was always at least one spot. Occasionally I would get my hopes up thinking I had found a spot only to see a motorcycle or small car parked in my way. It was my third time driving around the lot, still looking for a spot. There were none to be found. I guess it wasn't my day.

I drove my car away from the apartment building to find a spot somewhere else. I parked at the closest spot, which was a McDonald's five blocks away.

Walking to my apartment, it started raining. I started to run. I still was in decent shape. That corporate exercise program at my old office in San Diego had really helped, even if it was years ago. I hated to think of my time there though; it would only depress me. It was the only job I ever liked.

Approaching my apartment I glanced over at the parking lot, noticing two empty spaces in front of my entrance. I punched the air and cursed. Walking into the apartment, the hall was quiet and empty. That is why I chose this place. I got a nice corner apartment. My father gave me advice in choosing an apartment, telling me to always get a corner room so if there were noisy people, they could only be on one side. My father was a good man, and I loved him.

He was always there for me. When I got fired from my job in San Diego for drinking on the job, he was the one who helped me quit drinking altogether. I never did go to AA meetings; I just used the strength of my father. Even though I was fired from my job, he was proud of me for quitting alcohol. That was the main reason why I moved back to my hometown, to get my father's help.

I thought that maybe tonight I would go see my dad and mom. I hadn't seen them in a while. We still talked every week though.

I got into my apartment and threw my briefcase in the corner. I wondered what I should do. I had quit drinking years ago, even if it was too late. Slumped in a chair, I grabbed the remote control and flipped on the TV. Once again I caught the traffic report. This time it was the helicopter showing the backed-up freeway. An image of a car smashed into a concrete overpass caused my heart to miss a beat. That poor family, I thought. The camera zoomed in closer to get a better view of the wreckage. I could only watch in terror, as my father's car grew bigger on my screen. It felt like the bottom was going out on my life. I got up, picked up the coffee table, and threw it into the wall. I fell to the ground, drained from the incredible loss.

I knew what I wanted to do now. I stared at the bottle of wine sitting on the shelf near the TV. It was a gift from an old friend. I remembered the taste and the feel of drinking, the nights out at the bar with buddies. At that point, there was nothing I wanted more than a drink. I thought of my father. How he had helped me when he was alive. I was surprised; he helped me more now that he was dead.

Justin Qualler

WOMAN

Let go woman
Let go of his dark strong hands holding onto yours
Let space grow in memory.

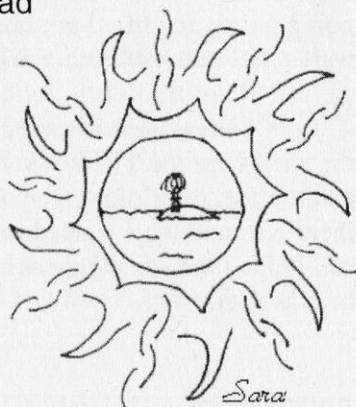
I remember the first time I saw his hands
Defying fire as he danced on the white sand
Moving to the beat of the African drums
His muscular oiled body leaping, vibrating
Finding me sitting on a rock near the sea
Hypnotized by the fire, the drums, the tropical night

These are the hands that cleaned Parrot fish
Cooked them in exotic seasonings
Served them to me in a satin sheeted bed
With red Hibiscus flowers scattered
White Monterey wine sipped and spilled

These are the hands that held mine when ill
Pushed back the hair from my forehead
Grated ginger for the healing tea.

These are the hands
Fingers folded in, making a fist
Knocked me to the ground

Let go woman
Let go
Just let go.

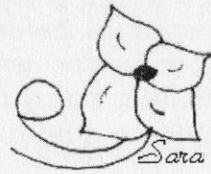


Kizzy

A Delicate Operation

Muscled, blood-flecked fingers
Pulling life to death places
Sewing seamless fast as my grandmother
Waiting room empty as an abandoned church
Full of lost angels
"Do you love what you sew?" "Do you believe in angels?"
"You're blocking my light."

Jane Ewens



If I Could Be

If I could be whatever I wished,
I'd wish to be the wind.
To fill the sails of sailing ships,
To touch the hearts of men.
To carry a feather to tremendous heights,
And take it to places unknown.
To be unnoticed by passers-by,
To be all alone.
To be cursed on winter days,
And blamed for raging seas.
I guess, if I could be whatever I wished,
I'd rather be just me.

Jonathan D. Hahl

Fat is what I am

Chubby thighs and bulging hips,
another piece of apple pie.
A round face to match my fat lips;
it's just another lie.

Chocolate and ice-cream are my enemies,
adding inches to my stomach.
Tell me, how many more calories?
Just give me a minute to panic.

Exercise in the morning,
nothing but water for lunch.
I ignore all the trembling,
'cause I'm losing another inch.

All I want is to be thin,
the anxiety will disappear.
I can see myself in . . . size one.
It's very clear.

Soon I'll be happy as ever,
Bony thighs and hidden hips.
Happy like never before,
deathly face and thin lips.

Marisa Fortin

"Sir, will you and the passenger please step out of the car? I am going to have to search the vehicle."

My heart was pounding as I removed the seat belt and stepped out of the rented vehicle onto the dusty highways of Arizona. The hot breeze along with the blowing dust coated my face as it mixed with my sweat forming some sort of sand mask. Angela, my friend's girlfriend, flew down with me from the northern states but never thought of getting pulled over. Think positive. No paranoid people on this trip.

The red 4 - door blazer and all its requirements were in perfect order. My credit card, my signature, and according to the rental agreements, I had every right to be driving north.

The policeman had told me he had pulled me over because he couldn't read the rental documents that took the place of our license plate. Angela and I talked about that minor detail less than 7 hours earlier, and realized having no plates could bring these "vacations" to an end.

"Do you have anything illegal in the vehicle?"

As I stared at this policeman, I saw my reflection in his wire rimmed sun glasses. The look on my face was that of total guilt. His hot breath seemed to make the desert breeze cool-like.

"No, sir."

"Nothing at all?"

"No, sir."

I had planned for a moment like this on my every excursion down. A moment with a state trooper, face to face, just him and my convincing story.

"Mam, do you know of anything illegal in the vehicle?"

It was Angela's time to shine; that's why I brought her. It looked better if we got pulled over - just a girlfriend and boyfriend traveling through the states together.

"No, sir," she replied.

"So let me get this story straight. You and your boyfriend flew down to Arizona, and now you're driving back to the northern states."

"Yes sir."

After that short series of 20 questions the officer told us to step to the front of the vehicle for safety reasons. He then entered the vehicle and began his search.

As Angela and I stood on the side of I-60, Arizona's most driven highway, we watched this man search our one way ticket to riches. The buzzing of the cars passing by echoed in my mind as I tried to search for a sane thought. The hot sun almost seemed to place a spotlight on the situation for passers-by to get a clear look as to what was going on.

"What's he looking at now?" Angela whispered as she pretended to make friends with the bugs that landed on our truck.

"Everything and anything," I said.

I tried not to let the officer see me as I peered through the front windshield hoping to keep tabs on his every move. First under the seats, then the console, and finally the glove compartment. Of course never finding a thing. My eye began to twitch as it followed him as he stepped out of the vehicle only to climb into the back seat. Angela by now had been introduced to nearly every insect in the Arizona desert. She walked in a pace like motion from one side of the truck to the other side, but always making sure never to seem concerned. She played it cool. Well worth the 1000 dollars.

"Are these your bags?" said a muffled voice from the backseat.

"Yes sir," I said

The unzipping of the bags sounded like the earth itself was peeling apart. The sun had moved just far enough to position itself in such a way that my chances of peering through the front window were eliminated.

"What's he doing now?" she asked once again.

"He's in our bags."

Nearly 20 minutes had passed since he entered our vehicle, and my feet began to grow just as tired as my wild scenarios as to what he could be finding. Angela had now sat down on the sand that ran trail along side I-60 and was gently flicking pebbles onto the highway.

"Sir, can you please step to the back of the vehicle and open the trunk for me."

I did, and then was once again instructed to go to the front of the vehicle. Safety reasons.

Less than two minutes of searching the trunk I heard the worst thing possible.

"Oh my god, he is going to his car," Angela nervously said

My throat closed up, my chest began to beat like a drum, sweat started to pour off my forehead, and my mind filled with thoughts quicker than the traffic passing by.

"What the hell is he doing?" I said

"I don't know. It looks like he is getting something."

"What?"

"Oh, it's a screwdriver."

He returned to the back of the vehicle and continued his search. With screwdriver in hand, he screwed off the side panels to the inside of the truck. After searching both side panels, I thought it was over.

A moment of relief settled over me but vanished when I saw the officer come towards me. His oak-like legs ran clear into the sky. His muscular shape made the back of my neck shiver. He must have stood 6-7 feet off the ground. I was certain his giant hands would soon be around my scrawny neck.

"Everything seems to be O.K.," he said. "Just one more thing. Do you mind opening the hood up so I can have a look at the engine?"

"No, sir," I said

Two minutes into that search, he shut the hood and took off his cap.

"Are we done officer?" asked Angela.

"Yes, you kids are free to go. Sorry about the inconvenience."

"No problem officer, just doing your job. You never know who's up to what now a days," Angela remarked.

"Yea," I said.

The officer then turned and proceeded back to his car. Angela and I climbed back into the Blazer. The pine tree smelling cologne of the officer still filled the air. I started the vehicle, and we both buckled up and waved to the officer as he pulled away.

As we pulled back onto the highway, my adrenaline high had started to fall. Angela just kicked off her shoes and put her feet on the dash, looked at me, started to laugh and said, "Holy shit that was close."

"I told you Angela. They won't check the spare tire."

This is Bliss?

Here is a couple: married for years.
Still, sometimes his comments will drive her to tears.

"Am I pretty?" she asks with a flutter of lashes.
"Absolutely!" replies the avoider of clashes.

"No, I'm not!" is the startling response from his wife.
(Confused, the man wonders what's changed in his life.)

"If you don't like my answers, then why do you ask?"
he begins strongly, as he takes her to task.

"I'm telling the truth," he says, "why do you doubt it?"
(He knows he shouldn't be asking about it.)

"Would you rather I tell you that you look quite fat?"
"Huh!" she replies. "I knew you'd say that!"

"I said you were pretty! I find you attractive!"
(Here's when the story becomes a bit active.)

"If that is the truth, then tell me once more."
(He wonders what she is fishing for.)

"Am I pretty?" she asks once more with a grin.
"You are not!" he lies. Oh, what trouble he's in.

"I thought so!" she cries and runs out of the room.
"My God," he declares, "I've married a loon!"

Patricia Karnes

Reflections on Age

As I look into the mirror
I can't believe my eyes.
A woman's mind unclear
In a childhood disguise.

I can't believe my eyes
Blondness flowing like the sea,
In a childhood disguise
Is that figure really me?

Blondness flowing like the sea
Confused with happiness and fear,
Is that figure really me?
Do I see hope in a tear?

Confused with happiness and fear
A woman's mind unclear,
I see hope in a tear
As I look into the mirror.

Erin DeNardo



Remember the Sun?

Remember the sun? You're lying down in the middle of your backyard, cushioned by the deep, green grass. Looking at the sky, you squint your fresh, young eyes up at the sun, trying to get a peak at it. Instantly, bright dots of yellow-white dance in front of you. You quit trying to look at the sun. Knowing it's there is all that matters.

The grass feels soft and smooth beneath you. It cools your tiny body as warm sunshine covers you like a cozy blanket. As you look up into the bluest sky you've ever seen, you see a few bright, puffy clouds floating by. You can make out dragon and dinosaur shapes in them. If you stretch your arms as far as you can, you just might be able to grab one and pull it from the sky, like a piece of cotton candy. You believe heaven is on those clouds, that God is sitting up there, floating past you. Just you, the sun, and God's throne.

You hear the low, steady buzzing hum of a bee in the distance. Quickly, you rise up on elbows and scan the flowerbeds your mom and dad had just planted the day before. You see nothing, so you scan the yard, left to right, like before you cross a street. There, by the fence that envelops your yard, you see a black dot swaying sideways. Somehow, it manages to pass through a link in the fence. You breathe deeply and lie down again. The bee is now in your best friend's yard. She is at school.

You wish she were lying next to you right now. She could then see the clouds, feel the sun, and listen to the still quiet of the spring morning. She's at school now, in kindergarten.

Soon, you, too, will be in school. You can hardly wait.

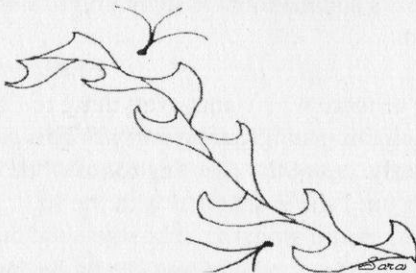
And then, you'll learn the truth about the sun: how it radiates energy, how far away from earth it is, how large it is, all divisible by powers of ten.

Remember the sun?

The Christmas Wish

In a distant time and place, a young girl
dreamed of a snow-white sky. She pranced and sang
about her place and wished upon bright whirls
of stars. One night, before the sunlight came,
a whisper woke the child. A golden light
surrounded her as a woman dressed in
white spoke to her softly. In brilliant white,
she appeared to grant the child the wish en-
titled to her. "Your soul is pure, my dear,
so, with gratitude, the Lord has chosen
you to see the miracle of the year."
To her surprise there came an explosion
of soft snowflakes, unique against bright blue.
Through love of God, her Christmas wish came true.

Patricia Schnell



Shopping With Mom

The boy lays on his bed and stares at the ceiling. He absentmindedly pokes his pinkie through the silver hoop attached to his navel. How in the world was he going to explain this to his parents?

A piece of gray fuzz catches the brooding teen's eye as he examines his stomach. *Hmmm . . . belly button lint?!?*

"I have the perfect belly button," he sighs.

"Ryan! Are you in there?" *God, her voice sounds like nails on a blackboard!!!*

"No, Ma!" Ryan rolls his eyes skyward.

"Yes, you are. I can hear you, Ryan!" The voice crescendos and rises three octaves. "Get out of that pigsty of a bedroom. We're going clothes shopping for you!"

Ryan groans in defeat as he pulls on a shirt and combs his hair.

"This rots," he mutters as he grabs his jacket.

"Ryan, are you coming?" his mother screams.

What is her problem anyway?

It is just the two of them going shopping today. Ryan leans his head against the glass window of the car and runs his hand over his belly button briefly. He is so glad he wore a baggy pair of pants and a big T-shirt.

They pull into a parking space at the mall, and it isn't until they're in the men's department at J.C. Penny's and his mom is searching through stacks of jeans, that Ryan realizes his problem.

His mom is the type of mom who wants everything to fit perfectly from top to bottom. There is no such thing as "growing into it." This same woman makes her sons come, rather reluctantly, out of the dressing room while she prods and pokes and tugs at the clothing until she is satisfied with the fit.

If Ryan's mom insists on the usual clothing check, he can count on the fact that she'll see the belly button ring and freak out for sure; she might even faint.

Luckily his mom tells him to try on the jeans while she finds some shirts to go with the jeans. Ryan darts into a stall with the clothes. He looks at his navel to find that it is red and irritated. What he wouldn't do for some peroxide right now.

He tries the three pairs of jeans on and decides only one pair fits. Soon after, his mom shoves some more jeans at him along with a few shirts. Everything is just fine until Ryan decides to take off a pair of jeans without unbuttoning the waist. That's when disaster strikes.

The silver hoop snags on the waistband as he yanks downward. The strangled cry in Ryan's throat manages to penetrate the dressing room door and reaches his mother's ears.

"Ryan?" her annoying voice screeches. "What's going on in there? Do you need help?"

Oh, my God, Ryan thinks in humiliation. *I am never coming out of the dressing room.*

This is not to mention the fact that he is in so much pain, he can still see stars. Ryan shakes his head and his vision clears.

"Ryan?"

"The pants don't fit," he says through gritted teeth.

"Do you need another pair?"

"NO!"

"Ryan, don't you dare shout at me like that."

Arrgh! Nails on a chalkboard. He bangs his head against the wall. Ryan throws the jeans out to his mom in resignation.

"Here," he mutters.

"Now, Ryan, we're almost done," his mom croons. "I just want you to try on this last thing. This time, I want you to come out and show me, though."

Ryan would have agreed to anything as long as it meant getting out of here. He grabs the blue and red pair of shorts only to find out that they are swimming trunks.

"Oh no!" he wants to shout. "I'm dead meat!"

"Ryan? Are you done in there?"

"They don't fit, Ma," he says quickly.

"Ryan, let me see," his mom coaxes.

"Mom, they don't."

"Ryan, now!" His mom's voice is already crescendoing.

"But Mom, they are ugly."

"I thought they didn't fit."

"Well, that and they're ugly."

"Ryan, do I have to come in there?"

"Um . . . no."

"Let me see," she repeats.

Ryan sighs in defeat and steps out by the mirrors.

"What do you mean they don't fit?" his mom scolds loudly. "They are fine, and they are also cheap."

A sales lady looks at them curiously.

"Now let me look at the waistband," his mom says, lowering her voice.

"Mom," Ryan pleads.

"Ryan, NOW!" His mom pokes and prods at the waistband as Ryan stands sullenly in front of her.

"Okay, get back in your street clothes. This is it for today."

Ryan lets out the breath he's been holding.

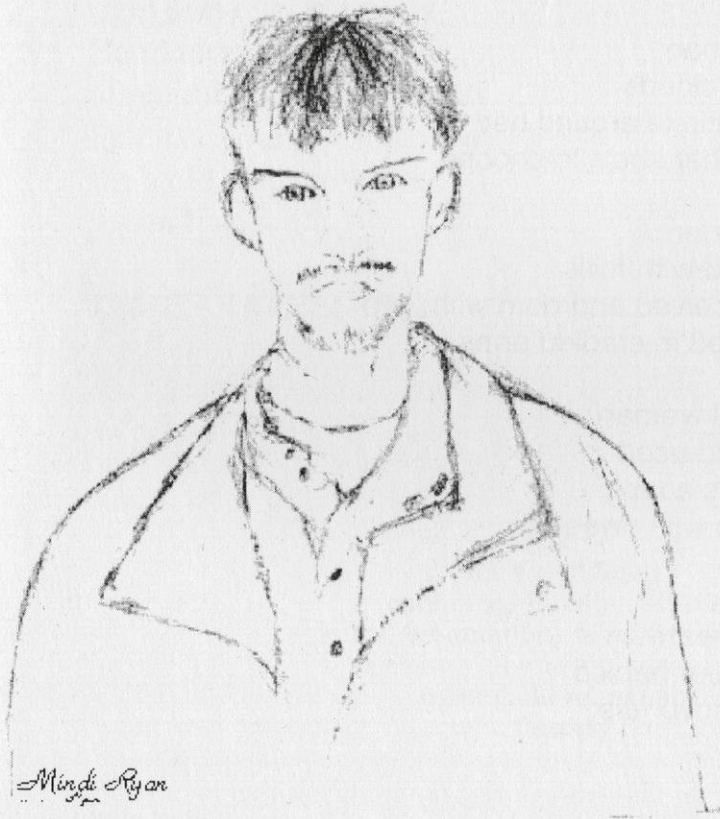
"Oh, and by the way . . . why is your underwear pulled up so high? The waistband is clean up around your neck. That's really disgusting, you know."

"I know," Ryan grins, not even bothering to tell his mom to lower her voice. He trots back to the dressing stall and passes his hand over the waistband of his underwear. He can just barely feel the silver hoop against his navel. He whistles as he changes his clothes.

"That wasn't so bad, now was it?"

Just happy to be alive.

Renae Schwenk



WOMAN'S VISION

Childlike woman
Playing with dolls
Babies born of cloth
Never cry, never die.

Puberty woman
Dancing on clouds
Men lovers circle around her
A baby's father she's to choose.

Married woman
Breasts filled with milk
Babies conceived and born with love
Gently rocked in cradled arms.

Menopausal woman
Wrinkled and used
Grandbabies supply
Empty arms with sweet joy.

Ancestral woman
Spirit of the earth
Watching your babies
Never cry, never die.

Kizzy

So Am I

I quietly crawled into bed.
She was there already.
I snuggled and threw
right arm over her body.
Hand touched bare flesh;
thigh just above knee, belly.
Felt like young woman, but
she's old, and worse yet,
so am I; so am I.

JAMES KACZMAREK

reality
harsh, difficult
confining, holding, limiting
rules, domination, rebellion, freedom
releasing, liberating, astounding
make-believe, magical
fantasy

Kyle Yauck

Freedom

Melissa drove because Scott had no license. Scott didn't have a lot of things – his own car, a job, an education, motivation – but she had fallen for him before she found out what a dead weight he was. She was only lucky that he hadn't become her financial responsibility.

She probably would have driven anyway. She wouldn't have trusted him with her life. Who knew how many drugs he had taken today? He was acting pretty mellow for his normally high-strung self.

It felt strange driving to a park that she used to walk to almost every week during childhood. It reminded her of their inequality – he came from a single child family where he was spoiled with all the conveniences. He'd never gone hungry or had to wear hand-me-downs or had to walk places because his family didn't have a car. Under normal circumstances, this would not have bothered her – she wasn't going to lose a friend just because they had had a better childhood - but he always talked so matter-of-factly about how all poor people were scamming society. Melissa had once told him of their poverty. She wasn't prepared for the reaction she got. He got a disgusted look on his face and said something to the extent of "You're cured of it now." Just during this car ride, he made several derogatory comments on how Milwaukee was being overrun by the homeless.

She chose to park in a parking lot rather than on the street. They had a picnic lunch with them, and the picnic tables were closer to the lots. This was a celebration of four years together, yet she wasn't sure if she wanted it to be a festive time. Those four years had taken a lot of time and effort on her part. She didn't think today could go by without a fight.

It turned out that it didn't really matter where she parked – Scott just walked past the tables with the picnic basket. He headed straight to the open fields where the geese flocked in summer. It was early autumn, and the geese were thinning out along with the leaves.

"I don't want to have to deal with geese droppings," she warned.

He faltered for a step or two but then pointed to the picnic table someone had pulled next to the water.

"We can sit over there," he said smiling, obviously proud of himself. Melissa couldn't help tsk-ing at how simply he could be made happy. He didn't know how to work hard for anything.

They crossed the asphalt path once more and headed left to the large geese pond that was the center of Wilson Park. Sitting down at the

picnic table, Scott pointed to the concrete steps beneath the park building that rested on the shore.

“Canoes.”

But Melissa was too busy inspecting from a distance the island in the middle of the pond. Trees covered ninety percent of the land so she couldn't make out the inner space. So much could be hidden in there. So much could be lost. And she could be the one to find it. She couldn't take her eyes from the isolated bit of land. Scott didn't take offense – he began unpacking the Styrofoam containers from Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Before he could reach for his standard drumstick and breast, she blurted out, “I'm leaving you.”

At first Melissa thought she hadn't been heard. He didn't react in any way. He continued to spread out the picnic lunch by settling the Coke cans in their place.

“Did you hear me? We're through.” Melissa emphasized this by standing up. Scott didn't understand subtleties. They wouldn't be here today if he did. She had to be painfully blunt.

“I didn't think you were serious,” he said. He had paused in the middle of unwrapping his plastic spork. She had his full attention, but she noticed he still didn't look devastated or surprised. After a moment of hurt, she eventually gave up when she realized he would never let go of his ways. Women were as dispensable to him as the drumstick he was even now tossing to the animals.

“We don't belong together, and I feel you may be holding me back.”

Scott went back to his chicken, licking the grease off his fingers and looked again at the canoes. Melissa looked once more at the isolated island, shrugged, and began walking towards the swings. They were behind Scott, and she only saw him turn once while she slowly kicked her legs to gain speed. He made no effort to join her – Melissa reasoned he wanted to eat before the food got cold. Before she could lose her nerve, she jumped off and left him.

B Boettcher

Untitled

Lost deep within your tired eyes I stare
Memories fade from your forgetful mind
A simple touch of kindness I share
Shadows whisper as you glare
As an angel, patient, waits behind
Lost deep within your tired eyes I stare
Giving my time for you I care
Your words of wisdom are always kind
A simple touch of kindness I share
White light gleams from over there
A special place with hope you'll find
Lost deep within your eyes I stare
There your wrinkles turn to skin so fair
No longer are you weak and blind
A simple touch of kindness I share
Wings of white are what you wear
You are always on my mind
Lost deep within your tired eyes I stare
A simple touch of kindness I share

Erin DeNardo

LOVE PAST

I met her in the corridor
And in the colonnades
I saw her from a distance
And sang sweet serenades,
I wrote her loving poems
That came from deep within
My heart and oh so tender
Her passion I need to win.

I passed her in the hallway
I thought to say that I
Loved her for eternity
But love was just passed by.

I vision her in my dreams
Her lovely face divine
Her body sent from heaven
All this is far from mine,
Our eyes met for just a second
But that was long enough
To see fire in those eyes
And enter their blazing gulf.

The past is just a memory
The times when we were shy
But still I do not know her
And still love is passed by.



Joel Hartmann

Loco Lori

I can't believe she's here

talking to him again!

I'm going to stand here until

he notices me because I know

he would rather be talking to me

than to her.

Look at how she throws her

hair in his direction and now

he's touching her elbow!

I hope she can feel me

stabbing her with my eyes until

she is completely drained and then

she will be so ghostly white

she'll scare him.

Maybe if I clear my throat

he will notice me and get his butt

over here.

I have something important to say

I always do.

Carolyn Faber

Another Polite Conversation

Don't come over here! Dear God, please don't let him come over . . . Damn!

"Hey, Tam!"

"Hey, Jeff." Why the hell did he have to come here? He knows I don't want anything to do with...

"Whatcha doin'?" As if I really care. She's changed so much since we were together. And what the hell is that smell? Patchouli oil? I suppose she thinks she's a hippie now. She probably even stopped shaving her armp...

"Drinking coffee." What the hell does it look like I'm doing, waiting for a bus? He's such an idiot. What did I ever see in him? Oh, and now he's sitting down. What, does he think four years gives him an open invitation? "I'm kind of waiting for a friend."

"Yeah, who?" in their right mind would want to be seen with you? My God, I didn't know the carnival was in town. Or did they just forget their sideshow when they left?

"Jason. I met him on tour, and he just got back into town yesterday." Why am I even telling him this? I wish he'd just leave.

"A Dead-head freak, huh?" My mistake. I guess the carnival is coming to town. God save us all!

"He's not a freak! In fact he's rather intelligent. More than some people I know! I mean look at you, with your baseball cap and pin-striped shirt! You're the freak."

"Chill out, Tam, I'm just going to order some...Ma'am? excuse me, ma'am? Could I get a bacon-cheeseburger and some hash-browns? Thanks."

"Are you really going to eat that?" He knows how I hate it when people eat dead animals in front of me. He probably ordered it on purpose.

"Oh, come on Tammy! It's only a hamburger!" That's right, and I'm going to eat the whole damn thing.

"It's not just a hamburger! That's just a disassociation. It's a dead cow. Do you have any idea what they do to those poor animals?"

"No, and I really don't care! God, a man can't even eat without being criticized!" Look at her. Eating is normal. What's that nose-ring about? And those clumps in her hair? What, she abandoned bathing altogether? And how about those tattoos . . .

"That's your problem, Jeff, you never did care. But that's all in the past. Guess what? I'm getting another tattoo. A dancing bear on my ankle." That'll get 'im.

"Now why the hell would you do something stupid like that?" To be more of a freak?

"Because I want to, the body is a canvas. Why not beautify it?"

"The body is a temple!" Besides, you just want the attention. 'Hey, you want to see my new tattoo?' Body graffiti if you ask me. "What happens when you get older and want to look presentable, and you have tattoos all over your body? Then what?"

"They're in places where no one will see them!" As if your opinion amounts to shit. He's so closed minded.

"Besides, my bros on tour accept me for who I am!"

"Yeah, whatever !"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothin', if you want to hang-out with druggies and be part of their white-trash movement, you go right ahead."

"You are such an asshole!" How could I ever have gone out with him?

"What!?!!" How dare she! I hope she never finds anyone! Ha, the way she looks, she won't need to worry. Who'd want to go out with a freaks like her?

"You heard me!" Asshole.

"I don't need to listen to you, you freak!"

"What did you call me?"

"A freak, a fucking freak!" What, she deaf too?

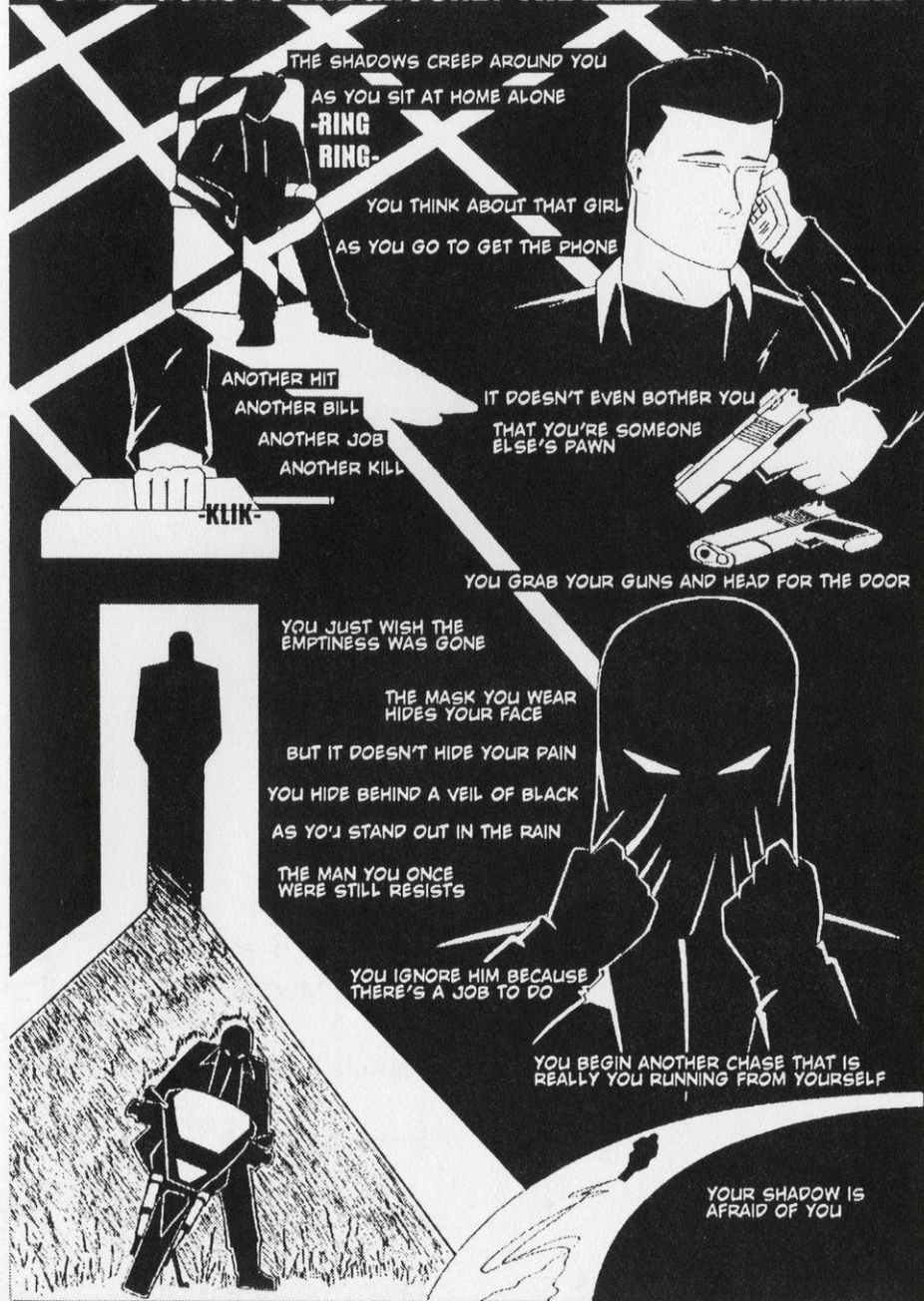
"Get the hell away from me! I didn't want you here in the first place!" And I don't need your verbal abuse, I had enough of that when we were going out. "Leave! Now!"

"I should have left along time ago. Besides I don't need to be seen with a freak!" and a whore. Bitch.

"Fucking Bastard!!!" I hate him! That fucking carnivorous bastard.

Jonathan D. Hahl

PUT MY GUNS TO THE GROUND: THE BALLAD OF A HITMAN



Tim Demeter

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